

Safe & Caring Communities

Mental Health First Aid Awareness

Mental Health First Aid

Introduction:

- ▶ Teaching community members how to respond in a MH emergency to offer support to someone who appears to be in emotional distress;
- ▶ Mental health problems are more common than heart disease, lung disease and cancer combined;
- ▶ Not everyone in psychological distress has a mental disorder; humans are complex;
- ▶ Distinguish between the person having the problem and the diagnoses and clinical descriptions of the problem;

Common Misconceptions About Mental Illness

- ▶ **Myth:** Mental disorders are related to personality flaws and/or a lack of will;
- ▶ **Myth:** People with mental disorders are violent;
- ▶ **Myth:** Healthy people aren't affected by traumatic events; if they are it reveals an underlying mental disorder;

Mental Health First Aid Action Plan

- ▶ Assess for risk of suicide or harm;
- ▶ Listen nonjudgmentally;
- ▶ Give reassurance and information;
- ▶ Encourage appropriate professional help;
- ▶ Encourage self-help and other support strategies.

The Recovery Paradigm: An Alternative Treatment Model

- ▶ Recovery is a deeply personal process or regaining physical, spiritual, mental and emotional balance;
- ▶ Recovery is a process of healing and restoring health and wellness;
- ▶ Hope: The most important facet of recovery and our most valuable contribution to helping someone in distress or crisis;
- ▶ Recovery is non-linear, focuses on strengths and peer support to reduce isolation and stigma.

Your Role in Mental Health First Aid

- ▶ Empathic Listening: The most basic and powerful way to connect to another person is to listen to them;
- ▶ Being fully present and truly listening; be aware of what your body language might be saying;
- ▶ Allow the person with the problem to do most of the talking;
- ▶ Avoid premature conclusions, reflect back what you hear;
- ▶ Listen as a non-anxious presence, without judging or moving into problem solving mode.

What is Mental Health?

...A state of well-being in which the individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and make a contribution to his or her community.

Why Mental Health First Aid?

- ▶ Many people with mental health problems do not seek help or delay seeking help;
- ▶ There is stigma associated with mental health problems;
- ▶ People with mental health problems may lack the insight that they may need help;
- ▶ People may be unaware that professional and other support services are available.

Applying MH First Aid

To developing mental health problems:

Depression, Anxiety
& Aggressive Behavior

What is Depression?

- ▶ An unusually protracted sad mood;
- ▶ Loss of enjoyment and interest in activities that used to bring joy;
- ▶ Lack of energy and tiredness, fatigue;
- ▶ Difficulty concentrating and making decisions;
- ▶ Moving differently: more slowly or with agitation;
- ▶ Sleep difficulties;
- ▶ Feelings of helplessness.

Warning Signs of Suicide

- ▶ Threatening to hurt or kill himself or herself;
- ▶ Expressing hopelessness;
- ▶ Feeling anger, rage or seeking revenge;
- ▶ Talking about feeling trapped or that there is no way out;
- ▶ Experiencing agitation or extreme anxiety;
- ▶ Withdrawing from friends or society often by symbolically saying “goodbye.”

How to respond to indications of suicide?

- ▶ Ask: “Are you having thoughts of harming yourself such as suicide? Are you thinking of killing yourself?”

Nonjudgmental Listening Skills

Your listening attitudes should reflect:

- ❑ Acceptance;
- ❑ Genuineness;
- ❑ Empathy;

Your verbal responses that show you are listening:

- ❑ Check your understanding by restating what the person has said;
- ❑ Listen not only to what is said but how it is said which will give you clues about feelings;
- ❑ Be patient, use minimal prompts, do not interrupt or offer advice;
- ❑ Avoid confrontation unless necessary to prevent harm or dangerous acts

What is an Anxiety Disorder?

- ▶ **Physical Symptoms:** Heart pounding, shortness of breath, dizziness and tingling, stomach knot, aches and pains, inability to relax.
- ▶ **Psychological Symptoms:** Sense of foreboding and pending gloom and doom, racing thoughts or none, impatience and anger, vivid dreams.
- ▶ **Types of Anxiety:** Generalized Anxiety Disorder, Panic Disorder, Phobic Disorders, Acute Stress Disorder and Post-traumatic Stress Disorder.

What Causes Anxiety?

- ▶ Family history of anxiety and anxious behavior;
- ▶ History of anxiety in youth including marked shyness;
- ▶ A traumatic experience(s);
- ▶ Difficult childhood including parental abuse;
- ▶ Family disruption: separation and divorce;
- ▶ Some medical conditions and medications.

How to Respond to Anxiety

- ▶ **Assess for risk of suicide or harm:** approach the person and find a suitable place and time to talk about their anxiety;
- ▶ **Listen nonjudgmentally:** Engage the persons in discussing their feelings, maintain comfortable eye contact; allow for silences; do not be flippant and void advice;
- ▶ **Give reassurance:** Do not blame, treat with respect and dignity, give consistent emotional support;
- ▶ **Encourage appropriate professional help:** encourage person to utilize treatment options;
- ▶ **Professionals who can help:** primary care physicians, counselors and therapists, psychiatrists and psychologists.

First Aid for Mental Health Crises

Suicidal Thoughts, Panic Attacks, Psychosis and Aggressive Behavior

How to talk to someone who is feeling suicidal

- ▶ Tell the person that you care and that you want to help;
- ▶ Express empathy and encourage treatment to convey a sense of hope.
- ▶ **ASSESS SERIOUSNESS:** Have you decided how you will kill yourself and when? Have you gotten drunk or high? And, have you made an attempt in the past?
- ▶ **How to keep the person safe:** A person that is seriously suicidal should not be left alone. If you are concerned about the person's immediate safety,
- ▶ CALL 911
- ▶ Or the National Suicidal Prevention Hotline: **1-800-273-TALK**

First Aid for Panic Attacks

- ▶ Symptoms of a panic attack resemble a heart attack or other medical condition. So, ask the person if they have a medical condition or have they had a panic attack in the past;
- ▶ If you know the person is having a panic attack remain calm and ask the person what they think might help;
- ▶ Acknowledge that the PA while frightening is not life-threatening;
- ▶ Reassure the person that the symptoms will pass and that they are safe;
- ▶ Do not recommend that the person breath into a paper bag.

First Aid for Aggressive Behavior: Take Threats Seriously

- ▶ To De-escalate a tense situation: Speak slowly and confidently with a gentle, caring tone of voice;
- ▶ Do not challenge or argue, avoid raising your voice;
- ▶ Use positive words: Stay calm vs. Don't Do That!
- ▶ Do not restrict the person's movement, avoid making abrupt gestures;
- ▶ Remain aware that certain actions such as involving law enforcement might exacerbate the situation;
- ▶ If the person is clearly delusional, do not try to reason with the person.

MH First Aid Scenarios

- ▶ A member of your meeting seems to have lost pride in her appearance and enthusiasm for life. Her speech is often sluggish. She seems sad and recently has started to give away her possessions to friends without plans to move. What should you do?
- ▶ A member of your meeting was involved in a serious car accident some years ago and since has been diagnosed with an anxiety disorder. You're talking to her when she breaks into a sweat, doubles over in pain and starts to hyperventilate.

Mental Health First Aid Resources

- ▶ <https://www.mentalhealthfirstaid.org/>
- ▶ <http://healthymindsphilly.org/en/>
- ▶ <https://www.nami.org/>
- ▶ <https://findtreatment.samhsa.gov/locator/link-PA>